LEGISLATURE

HALFWAY THROUGH THE SESSION

BILL OFFERS SOME RIGHTS TO GAY COUPLES

BY JOHN SCHROYER
john.schroyer@gazette.com

CHRISTIAN MURDOCK, THE GAZETTE

Erika Highstead, left, and Sarah Musick, shown at Memorial Park, have been together for four years. A bill would allow same-sex couples many benefits of marriage.

When Erika Highstead found her partner, Sarah Musick, on the floor of their bathroom a year and a half ago, she got Musick to the hospital, pronto.

But Highstead couldn't follow her there. The hospital forbade Highstead to visit Musick in the intensive-care unit.

"I was in tears. I was bawling," Highstead said.

A friend who was there said he had told the nurse that the two were partners.

"The nurse said, 'I don't care. I want you and you out of here,'" Highstead recalled. "I felt raped of my rights."

Musick was completely incapacitated, on the verge of losing her life. But because neither had medical power of attorney, and couldn't obtain it without paying thousands of dollars, the only people authorized to have access to Musick were members of her immediate family. And she was estranged from them because of her sexual identity.

If SB172 succeeds, Highstead and Musick will be able to obtain a civil union, a legal compact that would give them many of the same rights as married couples.

If that happens, Musick said, they would be first in

SEE COUPLE • PAGE 5

COUPLE: 'A substandard existence'

FROM PAGE 1

line to get one.

"We might be banging down the doors," she said with a laugh.

After the incident, a friend mentioned the story to an attorney acquaintance, who called the couple and offered them a reduced price for filing the necessary legal documents to establish mutual medical power of attorney, as well as other financial and legal benefits.

Though the incident was over a year ago, and all the preparations have been made, the documents are still sitting on the lawyer's desk, unfiled.

The couple can't afford to pay for them, even at the lawyer's discounted price of $3,000, Musick said.

If they could have married, or obtained a civil union, they would have done so years ago.

They have a seven-year-old son, born to Erika during a prior marriage. Before the medical crisis, the pair had been planning a ceremony to commemorate their relationship.

"It is a substandard existence when you aren't granted the same rights. And it seems so odd in this modern age," Musick said. "Our laws have not kept stride with our society. How is that possible?"

"GT" 4/1/11

STATE LEGISLATURE

JUDICIARY PANEL KILLS CIVIL-UNIONS MEASURE

Dozens pack committee hearing, hear testimony before 6-5 vote

The Denver Post

A House committee killed a civil-unions bill Thursday night that would have given gay couples many of the rights and responsibilities of marriage.

The bill failed, as expected, on a party-line vote, with six Republicans voting against sending the measure to another committee and five Democrats voting in favor.

Dozens of Coloradans packed the old Supreme Court chambers for the hearing on SB172, which began shortly before 2 p.m, while others listened in other rooms set up for the overflow.

The testimony — at times, part gay group therapy, part Bible study — continued until 8:30 p.m., when the committee began debating the merits of the bill.

Parents, partners and pastors testified in favor of the bill, which was sponsored by two Denver Democrats who are gay, Rep. Mark Ferrandino and Sen. Pat Steadman.

"This is not a radical concept," Ferrandino said. "It's a mainstream concept. ... This does not end marriage."

He said it was difficult to hear testimony against the bill from people who think "my life is wrong" but said those opponents had a right to their say.

An unusual number of witnesses were from Loveland. Reps. Brian DelGrosso and B.J. Nikkel, both of Loveland, were viewed as the GOP lawmakers on the House Judiciary Committee most likely to vote for the measure.

Bill supporters had worried about the House Judiciary Committee: three

SEE UNIONS • PAGE 6

WORLD

UNIONS: Earlier, rallies were held for, against bill

FROM PAGE 1

of the six Republicans are from El Paso County and were on record as opposing civil unions.

It wasn't the committee Ferrandino would have picked to hear the bill, he admitted last week.

The motion Thursday was to send the bill to Appropriations, a standard motion for a number of hearings.

Ferrandino and other bill supporters maintained that if they could have gotten the bill to the House floor they had the votes to get it passed. Republicans have only a 33-32 edge in the House.

Earlier Thursday, supporters and opponents of the bill gathered on opposite sides of the Capitol.

In a prayer vigil on the east side of the Capitol, opponents of the bill relayed a message that civil unions and same-sex marriage are wrong.

"I believe that to change the definition of marriage in Colorado law is not the right way to go," said Sen. Kevin Lundberg, R-Berthoud, who voted against the bill when it was heard in the Senate Judiciary Committee.

As the prayer vigil wrapped up, a rally in support of civil unions began on the west steps of the Capitol.

The size of that crowd dwarfed those at the prayer vigil. Supporters chanted "we are one" and "yes to civil unions."

The Gazette

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3/7/11

SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Fran, left, and Anna Simon with with their 3-year-old son, Jeremy, at a playground near their home in Denver.

LAWMAKERS TRY CIVIL-UNION ROUTE

Colorado measure grants couples some rights

BY IVAN MORENO
The Associated Press

DENVER • Wherever they go, Fran and Anna Simon carry their 3-year-old son's birth certificate to prove to anyone that they are his parents.

Jessie Ulibarri fears he won't be by the side of his partner, Louis Trujillo, in case Trujillo is ever hospitalized.

That's because same-sex marriage is banned in Colorado. But two openly gay lawmakers are leading an effort to grant gay couples the rights and protections married couples have through civil unions. Seven states, most recently Hawaii and Illinois, allow civil unions for gay couples. Proponents in Colorado believe the tide has changed since voters approved a constitutional ban on gay marriage in 2006.

Sen. Pat Steadman

INSIDE
Gay lawmakers playing a key role in same-sex marriage debate.
Page 5

SB172 faces its first committee hearing today.

"The constitutional amendment was about marriage and that's not what this bill is about," said Denver Sen. Pat Steadman, a sponsor of the bill. "The importance of this issue is that there are literally thousands of fami-

SEE HEARING • PAGE 5

"He is my spouse in every sense of the word, but to the law, he remains a legal stranger."
RICHARD MADALENO – Maryland state senator, talking about his partner of 10 years and their two children

GAY LAWMAKERS MAKING A BIG IMPACT

bate. One of Mell's points: Current law would bar doctors from consulting her if unions bill was signed into law last month, one of the key players was House Ma- support the bill.

"That was my one 'ask,'" he said. "The governor vetoed has been anticipating the chance to speak in support of the bill.

speech by Rep. David Pierce, a gay Democrat from Hanover who is raising two played upon the sympathies of individuals who don't think the matter through."

HEARING: GOP says Coloradans should focus on economy

Rep. Mark Ferrandino

erosexual couples with legally recognized unions don't even have to think about," said Anna Simon, a biology professor at the University of Denver.

Ulibarri, 27, public policy director of the American Civil Liberties Union in Colorado, said he's had to argue with pharmacists while picking up medicine for his partner, who had back surgery. Ulibarri said he visited Trujillo in the hospital but felt an underlying fear.

"People would ask, 'Well what's your relationship?' And I was always afraid that if they found out that I was — and I say this pretty sadly — if someone found out I was just his domestic partner, that I would have no legal protection to stay with him by his side during hard times," Ulibarri said.

Democratic Rep. Mark Ferrandino of Denver will carry the bill if it makes it to the House — and it could. All 20 Democrats in the Senate, where they have a majority, have signed as co-sponsors of Steadman's bill.

"I think the vast majority of Coloradans support this bill," Ferrandino said. "The question is, will this chamber, will they agree with what their constituents believe?"

Senate Republican leader Mike Kopp of Jefferson County said in a statement that he believes Coloradans want their lawmakers to focus on the economy.

"They have not asked us to revisit the decision they made in 2006 where they voted down recognition of civil unions," said Kopp. "While Democrats certainly have the freedom to introduce this legislation, the Senate Republicans will continue to focus on our agenda of limiting the size of government, public safety and promoting job growth."

Louis Trujillo, left, and Jesse Ulibarri with their 12-year-old son Israel in Denver.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

bar in Mexico

NEWS SERVICES

MEXICO CITY • Gunmen attacked patrons at a bar near the U.S. consulate in Ciudad Juarez early Sunday, killing three people in the second deadly club shooting in a week in the violent northern Mexico border city.

Two young men died at the Muro bar during the shooting around 1:30 a.m. and a third victim died after being taken to a hospital, said the spokesman for Chihuahua state prosecutors, Julio Castaneda. Two more men suffered wounds, he said.

The prosecutors office had not yet identified the victims, who were between 20 and 25 years old, Castaneda said.

YourTurn

June 8, 2006

The White House
Attn: First Lady Laura Bush
Washington, DC 20502-0700

Dear Mrs. Bush:

I am writing you because I believe you to be a woman of compassion, honesty and integrity.

In 1980, a dear friend of mine, Michael "Sergio" Rios, passed away in San Francisco due to complications from a kidney transplant. Sergio was a gay man who was fortunate to have had a life partner by his side for several years, including through the days he lay dying.

The day after Sergio's funeral, his family descended upon their home and literally stripped his life partner of everything they had accumulated during their years together. I can still see Sergio's partner, Gregg, sitting on the empty living room floor in tears because they took the ring Sergio had given him as a token of his commitment.

I, too, am a gay man who has been living with my partner for the past six-plus years. On July 16, 2004, my partner and I participated in a historic event, when we, with 50 other couples, descended upon the city clerk's office in Colorado Springs, Colo., requesting marriage licenses. Of course, we were denied, because same-sex marriages are illegal here.

However, two days later, my partner and I, along with the same 50 couples, were united in marriage by the founder of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches, the Rev. Dr. Troy Perry, and our own pastor, the Rev. Elder Nori Rost of the Pikes Peak Metropolitan Community Church in Colorado Springs.

We are not asking anyone to accept or condone a religious ceremony.

There are prominent members of the evangelical church movement in Colorado Springs, such as Pastor Ted Haggard of New Life Church and Dr. James Dobson of Focus on the Family, who believe homosexuality is an abomination against God, and that homosexuals should have no rights or protections.

I have to differ with their opinions because, in all honesty, I never asked or chose to be this way. It is the only life I have known; a life that I attempt to live as a God-fearing Christian. I attend weekly services at my church and serve as the music minister and accompanist for our 9 a.m. traditional service. I was also elected as lay delegate to our denomination.

I am writing to you today because my partner and I have no legal protection in the event of our deaths or becoming incapacitated. Our respective families could come and "steal" property that rightfully belongs to each other. We can, of course, protect ourselves with lengthy and expensive legal documentation. A more practical solution to this dilemma would be for my partner and me to legally marry under *civil* law.

We are not asking anyone to accept or condone a religious ceremony. Our union is already recognized by our denomination, which is recognized by the Council of Churches. We are asking for the rights under civil law to marry, and to accept the 1,000-plus laws, rights, privileges and responsibilities that come with a civil marriage.

I am also writing to you to plead with your husband, our president, to *not* write discrimination into the sacred documents that have served and led us as a nation for more than 200 years. I am asking you to plead with him to be remembered for representing all Americans, and not the few that would polarize this nation in the name of religion.

He has the opportunity to leave a legacy of granting civil rights and liberties to *all* Americans, rather than, for the first time in this nation's history, writing discrimination into our Constitution.

In closing, there will always be those that believe homosexuals are destined for hell. The unique and beautiful thing about being an American is that it is OK to have beliefs that differ from those around us. It is not, however, OK for any individual or group to oppress people and deny rights to individuals in the name of religion. If that was true, then the Mayflower expedition has been in vain. We have not created a nation of religious freedom, but a nation of religious hypocrisy.

With my utmost respect,

Brian E. Lund

Colorado Springs resident Brian E. Lund sent a slightly longer version of this letter directly to Laura Bush this week.

STATE & NATION

"He is my spouse in every sense of the word, but to the law, he remains a legal stranger."
RICHARD MADALENO – Maryland state senator, talking about his partner of 10 years and their two children

GAY LAWMAKERS MAKING A BIG IMPACT

Personal pleas give marriage issue footing

The Associated Press

FILE PHOTOS BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Rep. Deborah Mell, D-Chicago, works on the floor of the Illinois House in Springfield after she announced she will marry her longtime girlfriend. Of America's 7,382 state lawmakers, only 85 are openly gay.

Rhode Island House Majority Leader Gordon Fox, D-Providence.

NEW YORK • Of America's 7,382 state legislators, only 85 are openly gay. They are, however, playing an outsized and often impassioned role when the agenda turns to recognizing same-sex couples with civil unions or full marriage rights.

In Hawaii and Illinois, gay state representatives were lead sponsors of civil union bills signed into law earlier this year. In Maryland and Rhode Island, gay lawmakers are co-sponsoring pending bills that would legalize same-sex marriage. In New York, a gay senator, Tom Duane, is preparing to be lead sponsor of a marriage bill in his chamber later this session.

"For my colleagues, knowing that I am not allowed to marry the person that I love and want to marry, that's very powerful," said Duane, a Democrat from Manhattan. "It's more difficult for them to take for granted the right they have to marry when I don't have it."

The gay lawmakers have impact in two important ways. Their speeches, often evoking personal themes, can sometimes sway wavering colleagues, and they can forge collegial relationships even with ideological foes through day-to-day professional and social interaction.

Rep. Deborah Mell, a Chicago Democrat elected to the state House in 2008, made a point of bringing her partner to legislative functions, and a year ago announced their engagement on the House floor.

Her fiancee, Christin Baker, was on hand when Mell gave an emotional speech Nov. 30 during the civil union debate. One of Mell's points: Current law would bar doctors from consulting her if Baker, her partner for more than seven years, became seriously ill.

"The more visible we are, the better," Mell said. "When you look someone in the eyes, it's a little harder for them to deny that we should have the same rights."

Also speaking in that debate was Greg Harris, another gay Chicago Democrat, who urged his colleagues to be "on the right side of history."

The vote was 61-52 to allow civil unions, the Senate followed suit a day later, and Gov. Pat Quinn signed the bill into law on Jan. 31.

Harris — who is HIV-positive — said last week he felt pressure delivering that floor speech.

"What you say or don't say can win or lose a critical vote," he said. "There was a palpable sense that one way or the other, history was going to be made and everyone on the floor was going to be remembered for that vote."

In Hawaii, where a civil unions bill was signed into law last month, one of the key players was House Majority Leader Blake Oshiro, a gay Democrat.

Oshiro stood up in the closing minutes of the 2010 session to force a House vote on the measure, which was approved but vetoed in July by Republican Gov. Linda Lingle. In September, Oshiro won a primary election over a former Honolulu councilman who strongly opposed civil unions, then beat a Republican in November — ensuring the bill would re-emerge this year with a supportive Democrat, Neil Abercrombie, taking over as governor.

For Oshiro, the key moment was deciding to make a personal plea to members of his Democratic caucus to overcome their doubts and agree to a vote on civil unions in April 2010.

"I was thinking I wouldn't be able to really look in the mirror, knowing I had just let it fade," he said. "Ultimately, the caucus supported bringing it to the floor, even if some of them didn't support the bill.

"That was my one 'ask,'" he said. "The governor vetoed it, but it really set the stage for this year."

Hawaii and Illinois are now among seven states that allow civil unions or their equivalent — state-level marriage rights in virtually everything but name. Five other states and Washington, D.C., let gay couples marry outright, and Maryland and Rhode Island would join that group if pending bills win approval.

The Maryland marriage bill cleared the Senate by a 25-21 vote on Feb. 24. The debate included a speech by the chamber's only openly gay member, Richard Madaleno, citing his partner of 10 years and their two children.

"He is my spouse in every sense of the word, but to the law, he remains a legal stranger," Madaleno said.

Timing is uncertain for a vote in the Maryland House, which has six openly gay members. But freshman lawmaker Mary Washington, a lesbian from Baltimore, has been anticipating the chance to speak in support of the bill.

"It will be an important moment in Maryland history," she said. "I wouldn't miss the opportunity to speak up, not just for myself but for the many families in Maryland who need protection."

In Rhode Island, legislation to legalize same-sex marriage has failed in previous years, but advocates are optimistic this year because the new governor, independent Lincoln Chafee, is supportive. One of the bill's co-sponsors is Democratic House Speaker Gordon Fox, who is gay; he has not yet set a timetable for voting on the bill.

"He's passionate about this issue," said Kathy Kushnir, executive director of Marriage Equality Rhode Island. "It's not an abstract issue to him — he's talking about his life, his family."

Among the bill's leading foes is the Rhode Island branch of the National Organization for Marriage, headed by Christopher Plante.

Plante described Fox as "very pragmatic" and said he clearly has the potential to influence some colleagues during the debate on the bill. However, Plante asserted that its chances of passage remain questionable, notably in the state Senate.

In 2009, New Hampshire's legislature became the first to legalize same-sex marriage without ever facing pressure from marriage-rights lawsuits.

One of the emotional high points of that debate was a speech by Rep. David Pierce, a gay Democrat from Hanover who is raising two daughters with his partner. He described telling his oldest child, 5 at the time, that "some people don't believe we should be a family."

Afterward, Pierce said, a fellow representative came over to say that the speech prompted him to change his vote in favor of same-sex marriage.

After last November's election, the Democrats became the minority in both chambers, and Republicans proceeded to introduce bills aimed at repealing same-sex marriage.

Pierce serves on an election law committee chaired by David Bates, prime sponsor of one of the repeal bills.

"We acknowledge we fundamentally disagree on that question," Pierce said. "But it doesn't have to dissolve into being uncivil. ... We treat each other with as much respect as anybody."

He said he had only one conversation with Bates on the marriage issue last year, recalling that the Republican had told Pierce not to take the repeal effort personally.

"I said, 'Of course it's personal. You want to delegitimize my relationship with my partner of 18 years, and my two kids,'" Pierce recalled.

Bates, whose repeal bill is now scheduled for consideration next year, said he and Pierce work together well in the Legislature despite "diametrically opposed opinions on marriage."

As for the impact of Pierce's 2009 speech, Bates said, "It played upon the sympathies of individuals who don't think the matter through."

HEARING: GOP says Coloradans should focus on economy

FROM PAGE 1

lies in Colorado that currently do not have the equal protection of state law that are available to others."

Steadman's bill would grant couples in a civil union several legal rights, including the ability to be involved in medical decisions affecting their partners; parental rights where a child is involved; and the ability to decide what happens if a loved one dies.

The bill would enhance inheritance rights, make it easier for partners to list each other as dependents with health insurance, and give a partner priority in being designated a guardian or personal representative.

Steadman says he'd be one of the first to take advantage of being in a civil union with his partner.

"Yeah. I would do it this summer," Steadman said. "These are protections no family should be without."

Fran and Anna Simon, both 41, had a traditional Jewish ceremony three years ago, but it has no legal standing. They say they've endured many bureaucratic headaches because they're not a legally recognized couple.

Along with the birth certificate, the couple carry a card designating each other to be in charge of decisions in the event of an emergency.

They say they had to hire an attorney to petition a judge to put both their names on a birth certificate when they had their child through artificial insemination. And when Anna wanted to change her last name to Simon, she said she had to undergo a criminal background check, petition a judge and advertise the change in a local newspaper.

"These are things that het-

Rep. Mark Ferrandino

erosexual couples with legally recognized unions don't even have to think about," said Anna Simon, a biology professor at the University of Denver.

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"They have not asked us to revisit the decision they made in 2006 where they voted down recognition of civil unions," said Kopp. "While Democrats certainly have the freedom to introduce this legislation, the Senate Republicans will continue to focus on our agenda of limiting the size of government, public safety and promoting job growth."

Louis Trujillo, left, and Jesse Ulibarri with their 12-year-old son Israel in Denver.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

YourTurn

June 8, 2006

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In closing, there will always be those that believe homosexuals are destined for hell. The unique and beautiful thing about being an American is that it is OK to have beliefs that differ from those around us. It is not, however, OK for any individual or group to oppress people and deny rights to individuals in the name of religion. If that was true, then the Mayflower expedition has been in vain. We have not created a nation of religious freedom, but a nation of religious hypocrisy.

With my utmost respect,

Brian E. Lund

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"GT" 9/23/11

REALITY TELEVISION

PRODUCERS SWAP SITES OF TV SHOOT

Haggard episode wasn't filmed at Pride Center

BY WARREN EPSTEIN
warren@coloradosprings.com

Charlie Irwin, the executive director of the GLBT Pride Center, smiled when I asked about Thursday's planned shoot of "Celebrity Wife Swap."

Producers for the new ABC reality show had been working with Colorado Springs pastor Ted Haggard and his wife, Gayle, who will swap partners with actor Gary Busey and his girlfriend, Steffanie Sampson. One of the "swapped" couples was scheduled to be taped Thursday at the Pride Center. They would be sending out care packages to gay and lesbian military personnel overseas.

"Our guests didn't arrive," Irwin said, giving special emphasis to the word "guests."

HAGGARD: Friend says show will reveal 'interesting contrast'

FROM PAGE 1

Irwin said producers for Zodiac USA, which is shooting the show for ABC, threatened to sue him if he says anything about the new series or its stars.

Because The Gazette revealed details about "Celebrity Wife Swap" and the planned shoot Thursday — and the news was picked up by People magazine, the Washington Post and others — the producers scrapped their trip to the Pride Center and went with Plan B.

If Irwin knows anything about that plan, he's not talking.

"Celebrity Wife Swap" is based on the British show of the same name and is similar to "Wife Swap," an American TV series that focused on culture clashes among ordinary families.

The premise is simple: Haggard and Busey will swap partners (without sex) for a short time.

The first couple of days, the men make the rules for their new "spouses."

After that, the women take charge.

Lynn Dicken-Cerullo, a friend of the Haggards, says the show will reveal "an interesting contrast between the earthy, honest lifestyle of the Haggards' and the Malibu world of the Buseys."

Family-friendly discussion

6/21/10

Regarding The Gazette's June 9 article, "Conservative Dem: Keep 'don't ask, don't tell'":

Buried far beneath the very heartening, though slightly unheralded, news that our City Council approved the establishment of a human relations commission was a story about one U.S. congressman's concern regarding the proposed change to the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy.

It seems the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, a Democrat, said the military should maintain the ban on gay service members serving openly.

Changing the policy "might force families to explain homosexuality to their children" he said, and he doesn't think the discussion is family friendly.

Wouldn't it actually be very family friendly to reduce rates of teen suicide, youth homelessness and bullying in schools?

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth make up 20 to 40 percent of the homeless youth population across our country. More than 22 percent of LGBTQ students report being physically assaulted, and more than 86 percent suffer verbal harassment. Having open discussions with your children about respect and acceptance of other people might be unfamiliar territory for some families, but avoiding the discussion is not the answer.

Shawna Rae Kemppinen,
Inside/Out Youth Services
executive director
Colorado Springs

Screaming and stomping

8/1/11 GT

It is time for all employees and agencies of the city of Colorado Springs, from the mayor on down, to disassociate themselves from all political agendas.

The citizens of Colorado Springs have been subjected long enough to the "diversity" crowd's collective tantrums. It is time to say Enough! Stop! No more "proclamations," no more "statements," no more "forums," no more "festivals," no more forced reactions from the Mayor, from our City Council, or any other representative of the city of Colorado Springs.

All of the screaming, all the foot-stomping, all of the fist-pounding conducted by the "diversity" mob have become an embarrassment to the city. As a resident of Colorado Springs for some seven decades, I have never been as embarrassed on behalf of my fellow residents as I am now.

The Mayor of Colorado Springs deserves to remove himself from the cacophony of "diversity demands" so that he can attend to the job that he was elected to do. City Council deserves to remove itself from the same sordid political actions of the raucous few so that it, too, may attend to its responsibilities.

Whitney Galbraith
Colorado Springs

Answer isn't badgering others

Now that the hubbub about PrideFest has settled, I am compelled to ask this question. Why does a community of people need a festival and a political endorsement to feel good about their life choices? I don't have parties and look for public approval to salve my conscience over my aberrant inclinations. What's next? White supremacists? People who like sheep? C'mon, folks. Go about your business if you're inclined to do so, and let the mayor be. If your conscience is plagued about something, maybe the answer is not badgering everyone else into telling you its okay.

And by all means, keep it off the front page of the newspaper! That's Independent rag nonsense. And you wonder why print media is falling out of relevance.

Joe Monforton
Monument

GT 8/15/11

GT 8/3/11

MANITOU MAYOR OFFERS SUPPORT OF GAY PRIDEFEST

'Giant thank you' offered for positive contributions

BY JOHN SCHROYER
john.schroyer@gazette.com

Manitou Springs Mayor Marc Snyder considers his town a leader in El Paso County. And he hopes that in time Colorado Springs will take a step its neighbor to the west took on Tuesday night.

That's when the City Council unanimously voted in support of a resolution honoring the gay community for its "positive contributions to the Manitou Springs community and the region."

The resolution singled out PrideFest, the weeklong annual gay pride celebration in Colorado Springs, and lauded it for promoting "tolerance, diversity, equality, and respect for all people." The festival was held three weeks ago.

Charles Irwin, executive director of the Colorado Springs Pride Center, called the resolution a "phenomenal step in the right direction."

"There was real genuine emotion and support for the (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender) community. It felt to me as a giant 'thank you for working on equality,' probably more so than I've ever felt from a government entity," said Irwin.

The resolution came five weeks after Colorado Springs Mayor Steve Bach refused to sign a proclamation supporting PrideFest. Snyder and Councilwoman Coreen Toll said the Manitou measure was not intended as a response to Bach's position.

"I don't want anyone to see this as a poke in the eye of Colorado Springs. This is really about Manitou Springs and recognizing the good work that the LGBT community has done," said Snyder.

Though Councilman Michael Gerbig could not be reached, Toll said the measure was his brainchild. Gerbig's mother, Toll said, was openly gay, so to Gerbig, the issue was personal.

"He decided that it was overdue, in taking a step to honor those relationships," said Toll. "Until they're granted the rights of all citizens and not called names and discriminated against, we need to continue to support these kinds of diverse expressions of humanity."

Snyder believes the Manitou resolution will eventually help gays be recognized throughout El Paso County.

"If Colorado Springs sees that the sky doesn't fall, then they might consider following suit," Snyder said. "Maybe it will make it easier for other cities to do the same down the road."

Contact the writer 476-4825.

The 'hubbub' isn't settled

Re: "Answer isn't badgering others:" Joe Monforton seems to think that the so-called "hubbub about Pride Fest has settled."

Being gay is not a choice. You can't "pray it away," you can't "reparative therapy" it out of you, and we are here to stay. As long as I have breath I will work to make sure the path toward equal rights for all gay people is on the front page of every news media outlet in the country, including The Gazette, until we are afforded (you might want to write this word down: *same*) the same rights as every other American.

Gay marriage is not the same as you marrying your sheep. It is making marriage laws equally available to committed gay couples. Six states have done this already and the world has not come to an end. Call the veterinarians ... no one is applying for a doggie marriage license. That is merely an argumentative stance taken by the religious extremists to keep marriage as a guarded prize granted only by the church. In America, I am to be guaranteed equal treatment, no matter what that church doctrine says.

So, no, the "hubbub" isn't settled. We still demand equal recognition under the protection of the Constitution. We will ask for that proclamation to be signed by our city leaders until being gay is no longer dismissed, discounted or derided by extremists like you, Focus on the Family, Fred Phelps and our city leadership.

Carolyn Cathey
Colorado Springs

GT 8/14/11

GT 8/26/11

OUR VIEW

BAN DISRESPECT BY MILITARY PERSONNEL

It would eliminate concerns about gays

The military's ban on gays will end next week, on Sept. 1. It will remain legal for Air Force Academy cadets, and those in other military institutions, to secretly hate lesbians, gays, bisexuals or transgendered people. It is the right of any member of the military to believe other members are sinners destined for Hell. Thoughts, values, beliefs and sexual proclivities belong to individuals. That is precisely why we should not have policies that exclude individuals from service to government institutions on a basis of sexual orientation.

It is not OK for any member of our armed forces to treat another person or group with disrespect. Each has the right to hold disrespect in his or her heart, but not to express or act with disrespect while in service to this country. Unlike the private sector, military is not an open and free society. Civilians are free to tell gay jokes in public, but military personnel have no such freedom. They are in the service and defense of all law-abiding Americans and are expected to serve in a greatly diverse group.

It is amazing to almost anyone under age 40 that individuals have traditionally been excluded from military service on a basis of sexual orientation, and more recently have been told by government to conceal their sexual identities. Young Americans, in general, don't like the divisive nature of their country's past. Some rightly act with dismay upon learning of racial injustice in a country that was founded for no reason other than to uphold the freedom of individuals to live peacefully as they choose. Injustice based on sexual orientation is not identical to injustice based on race, though it is similar. It is different because government could never accept blacks into the military with a "don't ask, don't tell" policy. Few are able to conceal ethnicity, but individuals can keep quiet about their same-sex intimate desires or relationships. Additionally, some people believe — probably by mistake — that sexual orientation, unlike ethnicity, is a choice.

All such considerations are the splitting of hairs. In a great society, humanity will consist of a tremendous variety of individuals. Not all will love or respect one another. But all, for the sake of progress and peace, should treat one another with respect.

It is that simple. All concerns about openly homosexual Americans serving alongside openly heterosexual Americans have no merit if military brass demand respect among the ranks. That means no gay jokes, no sexual proselytizing, no harassment and no other forms of disrespect.

"It's all about creating and reinforcing a culture of respect," said Lt. Gen. Michael Gould, the academy's superintendent, in an interview with Gazette reporter Tom Roeder.

Had respect been properly enforced throughout the academy's history, the institution may have avoided past scandals involving mistreatment of women and non-Christians.

Individuals with radical differences don't need special skills or sensitivity training to live and work peacefully together. None of us needs to change our morals or beliefs. We need only act and communicate with respect. It's a simple, reasonable and moral expectation. It is an essential ingredient to achieving and maintaining the freedom our military is supposed to protect. — **Wayne Laugesen, editorial page editor, for the editorial board. Friend Wayne on Facebook; follow him on Twitter.**

Culture of respect for all

After reading the article, "Starting transition to accepting gays," in the Aug. 21 edition, I would like to express my concerns regarding this significant social engineering change at the United States Air Force Academy.

I find that LTG Michael Gould's initiative that establishes a new "culture of respect" at the Academy may have unintended consequences. We all agree that treating people with respect and dignity is the right thing to do. Leaders who fail to understand this are ineffective. However, will creating such a culture at the academy that imposes the acceptance of politically correct social values upon those with strong Judeo-Christian beliefs about sexual morality undermine unit cohesion and morale in our military? I believe that it will.

What also alarms me is the disclosure that the academy needs to create such a culture. Hasn't the academy always promoted a "culture of respect?" Then, what kind of leadership program has the academy been pursuing in recent years? Apparently, it has not been working as well as expected. Is it because cadets are being forced to accept moral values that are only embraced by a minuscule minority of our society?

It has been my view that our armed forces have been instrumental in promoting the idea to value and respect the contributions of all its members. It is because of this attitude that our military is recognized as a bastion of equal opportunity for all those who serve. Now, until recently, our armed services embraced Judeo-Christian values as essential to creating a morally-fit military. However, our current President and many congressional, progressive representatives no longer see it this way as they passed and signed into law the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell."

I hope that the superintendent ensures that this "culture of respect" applies to all cadets without excluding those who embrace Judeo-Christian values. These values have been part of our society and military from the founding of this great nation. However, it appears to me that these values are being criticized by a radical, progressive movement that believes that these values are mean-spirited, and consequently, those who believe in these values should be ostracized.

Will Christian cadets be required to sleep in the same room, to bathe in the same facilities, and to use the same rest rooms as those who identify themselves as gay, lesbian, transsexual, or transvestite? Or will the Air Force Academy respect and protect the personal privacy and rights of those who believe that the gay and lesbian lifestyle is unacceptable?

Finally, there is certainly an ethical dilemma for those who are Christian and lead the Air Force Academy, the Air Force, and other military service branches. Why? Because as Gould stated in the article: "It's all about creating and reinforcing a culture of respect." How Gould and other senior military leaders handle this dilemma will decide if we are able to retain those of the highest moral character; thus, ensuring the existence of the finest military in the world.

Andy Nordby
Colorado Springs

"GT" 8/29/11

The bad things of society

Re: Ban disrespect editorial (Aug. 26):

Wayne Laugesen's diatribe concerning respect and the military seems to betray a lack of military service or experience in a military environment. He seems to forget that, in "the divisive nature of our country's past," it was the military that first allowed respect for "colored people" (not a choice attribute) before society in general accepted the pattern. It was the military that used to instill confidence, teamwork, a strong work ethic, and respect for others — good things that eventually spilled out into the general populace.

However, in more recent years, the opposite has happened. The bad things of society have been spilling into the military at an alarming rate; increased drug and alcohol use, less personal discipline, more individuality, and, now, homosexuality.

I have no issues with respecting an individual's lifestyle choice, and homosexuality is a choice, and respecting that the choice is wrong. What I and other current and former military personnel do not respect is having that lifestyle choice thrown in our faces and forced upon us.

Despite Gen. Gould's quote, the military is not "creating and reinforcing respect." It is "creating and reinforcing" the degradation of a society run amok. It is compromising the good things that the military used to stand for. It will add additional costs that we cannot afford in terms of housing and benefits in an era of severe budget cuts. No good thing can come from the repeal of DADT or the acceptance of homosexuality.

Joseph Ford
Colorado Springs

"GT 8/30/11

Honesty a Christian belief

Andy Nordby's Aug. 29 letter to the editor suggests that the Air Force Academy's decision to allow homosexual cadets to be open about their orientation qualifies as "social engineering." He explains that this move imposes "politically correct social values" on those with strong Judeo-Christian beliefs.

This is interesting to me as a Christian. Among my deeply held beliefs is that of honesty. It ranks fairly high.

For nearly two decades we've asked the homosexual members of our armed forces to sacrifice their honesty and personal integrity in order to serve their country. The repeal of DADT and its impact on the Air Force Academy is simply to allow cadets to be truthful about who they are.

I didn't realize that honesty was now a politically correct social value rather than a Judeo-Christian belief.

Brett Ogden
Colorado Springs

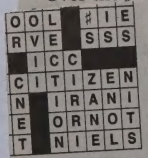
GT 9/1/11

Gay & Lesbian Fund farewell

With tears and hugs, community supporters, staff members and caring friends gathered at the Gay & Lesbian Fund for Colorado on Dec. 7 to toast the accomplishments of the past 15 years and to say goodbye. GLF is closing at year's end, although the nonprofit's grants to area groups will continue. Still to be determined: the fate of the building at 315 E. Costilla St.

The holiday party/wake paid tribute to 15 years of "changing the perception of being gay" after the hate spawned by Colorado's Amendment 2 denying gay rights, said Executive Director Mary Lou Makepeace. There's still much to be done, she said, but "gay and lesbians in Colorado, gay or lesbian students, gay cowboys could all stand a little taller. They were safer than ever." People here became more welcoming and inclusive, she said.

Over the years GLF has-



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12-18

A FINAL HURRAH FOR THE GAY & LESBIAN FUND FOR COLORADO

Tim Sweeney, head of the Gill Foundation, at the final event.

The final party was a time to catch up.

Sisters Linda, left, and Leslie Weise.

Emotions ran high as everyone watched a GLF video.

Friends Patty Carbone, left, and Mary Lou Makepeace.

Bill Mead, left, Jim Jackson and Susan Edmondson.

Joseph Massimini, left, and Morris Price.

GT 12-18-11

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Over the years GLF has been a major philanthropic donor, giving millions of dollars to wide-ranging groups covering arts and culture, healthy families, public broadcasting and more, said Makepeace.

Gill Foundation head Tim Sweeney was emotional as he thanked the GLF staff and said, "even with the closing of this building, the Gill Foundation is committed to Colorado Springs. As we proceed we will look at what is the way to make the greatest impact. We are committed to this fight for equality."

Addressing the group of friends, Sweeney said, "We would not be where we are without the relationships that were built over the past 15 years." And, looking at a tearful Mary Lou Makepeace, asked, "What can you say about her?" He called the much-honored Makepeace "a woman who is changing the world." To Makepeace he said, "You are perhaps the best gift to the state of Colorado."

With that, everyone shared a champagne toast and Makepeace showed the final gift to each guest, a tiny flashlight "for us to keep the beacon going, to keep shining the light on equality in Colorado."

More photos: coloradosprings.com

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GT 12-18-11